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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 006028

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA AND PRM; DHS FOR BCIS
CPA FOR BARTLETT; ATHENS AND ROME FOR BCIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2013

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: GOJ PLANS TO CLOSE RUWEISHED REFUGEE CAMP

REF: AMMAN 5550 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CDA David Hale per 1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: Minister of Interior Habashneh informed UNHCR on Sept. 8 that the GOJ intends to close the Ruweished refugee camp and transfer the remaining 550 camp residents to the no-man's land (NML) camp between the Jordanian and Iraqi border posts, preferably by October 15. UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior subsequently established a working group to review the remaining caseload and identify possible solutions, including voluntary repatriation to Iraq. Protection conditions in the NML camp are worsening; UNHCR's preferred solution is to move the 1,000 refugees from NML to the UNHCR camp at Ruweished. Bronee asked Charge to urge the GOJ not to close the Ruweished camp. As reported ref, we have urged the GOJ not to close the camp prematurely and will continue to counsel a slow approach. End summary.

2. (SBU) In a September 8 letter, Minister of Interior Habashneh informed UNHCR that the GOJ intends to close the Ruweished refugee camp and transfer the remaining 550 camp residents to the no-man's land (NML) camp between the Jordanian and Iraqi border posts. Habashneh reaffirmed this message in a September 11 meeting with UNHCR Representative Sten Bronee, explaining that the GOJ had "resolved all problems" by allowing 386 Palestinians with ties to Jordan to leave the Ruweished refugee camp on August 24 and reside permanently in Jordan (ref). Habashneh told Bronee the GOJ would like to close the camp by October 15. UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior subsequently established a working group to review the remaining refugee caseload and identify possible solutions, including voluntary repatriation to Iraq. Habashneh and Bronee will meet again before the end of September in order to review progress.

3. (SBU) Briefing Charge and refcoord on these developments on September 17, Bronee said UNHCR hoped to keep the Ruweished camp open until a permanent solution could be found for the 550 remaining camp residents. Acknowledging that most of the residents do not qualify for UNHCR refugee status, Bronee nevertheless believes (correctly, in our opinion) that conditions are not yet right for returns to Iraq and hopes to appeal to Jordanian humanitarian sensibilities to allow the Ruweished residents to remain in the camp. Bronee characterized GOJ plans to move the Ruweished camp residents to the NML camp as impractical and dangerous, explaining that protection conditions in NML have worsened. A "market" in goods and services between the NML refugees and passing vehicles is booming, with increasing cases of smuggling and even allegations of sexual harassment and abuse leveled against employees of the Hashemite Charitable Organization, UNHCR's implementing partner. UNHCR also worries that the NML camp will not be able to withstand winter rains, as it is located in a depression just next to the Amman-Baghdad highway. Given these concerns, UNHCR's preferred solution would be to move the NML camp residents to Ruweished, although Bronee acknowledges that such a move would risk creating a pull factor, especially for Iranian Kurds from Iraq's Al Tash refugee camp.

4. (SBU) Bronee asked the U.S. to intervene with the GOJ to urge continued patience and allow the Ruweished refugee camp to remain open. Emphasizing that UNHCR does not view local integration as a solution for any of the new Iraq caseload, Bronee said he also will urge resettlement countries -- including the U.S. -- to consider some of the new caseload for resettlement. Bronee added that the GOJ is especially eager to find solutions for the five Mujahaddin-e-Khalq (MEK) members still remaining in the Ruweished camp, one of whom possesses an expired U.S. green card. Minister of Interior Habashneh told Bronee the GOJ had pledged not to send the MEK back to Iraq, but would not allow them to stay in Jordan. (NOTE: We are consulting with DHS and others on the U.S. LPR.) Bronee urged the U.S. to move quickly to identify new housing for the displaced Palestinians in Baghdad, as improved conditions in Iraq will encourage those displaced in Jordan to return to Iraq. Charge agreed to raise UNHCR's concerns with GOJ interlocutors, noting that we are actively engaged in finding a solution for those UNHCR-recognized refugees who could qualify for resettlement in the U.S.

5. (C) Comment: As reported ref, we urged the Prime

Minister August 28 not to close the Ruweished camp prematurely and will continue to counsel a slow approach on this issue, keeping the GOJ fully informed of U.S. efforts to find solutions for this caseload. As part of our effort to find solutions, we have asked UNHCR to prepare group referrals for the 60 Somali and Sudanese cases from Ruweished and have requested a DHS resettlement mission for early November. A positive commitment from DHS would bolster our case with the GOJ and demonstrate the international community's commitment to finding a solution for the new war-related caseload.

16. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.
HALE